

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SP-02 USIA-06 AID-05 EB-08 NSC-05
TRSE-00 SS-15 STR-04 OMB-01 CEA-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03
LAB-04 SIL-01 L-03 H-01 DODE-00 PA-01 PRS-01
PM-04 CU-02 /092 W
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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 952
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMCONSUL MONTREAL
AMCONSUL TORONTO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUEBEC 0147

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: QUEBEC'S DOGPATCH

1. SUMMARY: AFTER THREE DAYS IN GASPE, I CONCLUDED THAT REGION IS DESPERATELY POOR AND HAS LITTLE APPARENT POTENTIAL FOR EASY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. LACK OF OPPORTUNITY ENCOURAGES BEST AND BRIGHTEST ELEMENTS IN POPULATION TO MIGRATE. POLITICALLY, REGION REMAINS PREDOMINANTLY CONSERVATIVE THOUGH THERE ARE STIRRINGS OF MILITANT NATIONALISM BEGINNING TO SHOW. TWO OF FOUR CONSTITUENCIES WERE CARRIED BY PQ IN LAST PROVINCIAL ELECTION. HOWEVER, NO ONE PREDICTS EARLY SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM. IMPORTANT FACTORS LIMITING GROWTH OF SUPPORT FOR PQ AND INDEPENDENCE ARE THE MIGRATION OF LARGE NUMBERS OF BEST EDUCATED YOUTH AND EXISTENCE OF SIZABLE ANGLOPHONE POPULATION IN GASPE AND BONAVENTURE DISTRICTS. CONSTITUENCY MANAGER FOR LIBERAL LEADER, GERARD D. LEVESQUE, CONFIDED FEAR THAT PQ MIGHT SUCCEED IN CONVINCING VOTERS THAT INDEPENDENCE WOULD BRING BRIGHT FUTURE. SOURCE OF HIS PESSIMISM MAY BE LIBERAL LEADER WHO MANAGER DESCRIBED AS "CORNERED" BETWEEN INFLEXIBLE FEDERALISM AND APPEARANCE
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OF "DISLOYALTY" TO QUEBEC SHOULD HE ATTACK PQ NATIONALIST MEASURES. MANAGER REVEALED AN ANTI-PQ MILITANCY IN PRIVATE DISCUSSION WHICH WE HAVE NOTED ELSEWHERE AMONG QUEBECOIS SMALL BUSINESSMEN. END SUMMARY

2. AFTER A WHIRLWIND THREE DAY TOUR OF THE GASPE, MARCH 27-30, I CONCLUDE THAT THIS REGION IS QUEBEC'S APPALACHIA, DESPERATELY POOR

AND SPECTACULARLY BEAUTIFUL. SADLY, IT IS LIKELY TO REMAIN
SO DUE TO A PAUCITY OF KNOWN, EXPLOITABLE RESOURCES AND TO ITS DISTANCE

FROM POPULATION CENTERS. POTENTIAL FOR TOURISM IS HIGH, BUT SEASON
IS ONLY 2-3 MONTHS LONG. DURING LONG WINTER, REGION SUFFERS
30-35 PERCENT UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG ITS LABOR FORCE. RESULTING POVERTY
AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITY CAUSE GASPE TO LOSE ITS BEST AND BRIGHTEST
YOUNG FOLK WHO BLEED AWAY TOWARDS MORE PROMISING AND MORE EXCITING
OPPORTUNITIES IN OTHER PARTS OF QUEBEC, CANADA AND THE U.S.

3. POLITICALLY, THE REGION REMAINS CONSERVATIVE ALTHOUGH THERE
ARE SIGNS, AS ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE, OF A STIRRING OF MILITANT
NATIONALISM AMONG YOUTHFUL FRANCOPHONES AND A CORRESPONDING
UNEASE AMONG THEIR MORE CONSERVATIVE ELDERS. ALTHOUGH PARTI QUEBECOIS
CANDIDATES WON TWO OF THE FOUR GASPE SEATS (MATAPEDIA AND MATANE)
IN THE LAST ELECTION, A MAJORITY IN THE REGION WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY
VOTE AGAINST INDEPENDENCE SHOULD A REFERENDUM BE HELD IN THE NEAR
FUTURE. AS ELSEWHERE IN QUEBEC, LONGER TERM ESTIMATES ARE LESS
CERTAIN.

4. SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS ON THREE OF FOUR GASPE RIDINGS FOLLOW:

A) MATANE:

1) RIDING WAS CARRIED FOR PQ IN LAST ELECTION BY PRESENT MINISTER
OF NATURAL RESOURCES, YVES BERUBE. ACCORDING SEVERAL LOCAL SOURCES,
PARTI QUEBECOIS' HOLD ON SEAT IS NOT YET SOLID. VICTORY IN LAST
ELECTION WAS DUE TO WAVE WHICH SWEEPED PROVINCE COUPLED WITH WEAK
LIBERAL INCUMBANT WHO NEGLECTED CONSTITUENCY.

2) AMONG PREDOMINANTLY FRANCOPHONE POPULATION ONLY SOME 30 PER-
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CENT FAVOR INDEPENDENCE, ACCORDING WELL-INFORMED MUNICIPAL
SECRETARY-TREASURER OF MATANE, ANDRE LAVOIE. ISSUE WHICH
CONCERNS MOST IS PRESERVATION OF FRENCH CULTURE AND
LANGUAGE. HOWEVER, SENSE OF CULTURAL VULNERABILITY IS NOT STRONG
IN MATANE WITH OVER 90 PERCENT FRANCOPHONE POPULATION.

B) GASPE:

1) VOTE SPLIT IN ALMOST EQUAL THIRDS IN LAST ELECTION. UNION
NATIONALE CANDIDATE WON SEAT. HIS VOTE WAS FOLLOWED CLOSELY
BY LIBERAL AND PQ CANDIDATES. DEFEATED PQ CANDIDATE, JULES
BELINGER, WHO WAS RECENTLY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF PQ REGIONAL COUNCIL
FOR EIGHT EASTERN DISTRICTS, TOLD ME ANY PQ CANDIDATE COULD EASILY
CARRY RIDING IF ELECTION WERE AGAIN HELD TODAY. NONE OF MY OTHER
INTERLOCATORS SHARED THIS OPINION. THE COMBINATION OF A STRONG
ANGLOPHONE MINORITY OF 15-20 PERCENT COUPLED WITH AN ABNORMAL
AGE DISTRIBUTION AMONG POPULATION AS RESULT OF MIGRATION
AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE VIRTUALLY ASSURES THIS SEAT WILL REMAIN
BEYOND PQ REACH FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUEBEC 0147

2) EVEN BELINGER ADMITTED REFERENDUM VOTE WOULD NOT AT
PRESENT FAVOR INDEPENDENCE. MUCH "EDUCATION IS NEEDED TO DEMONSTRATE
ADVANTAGES OF SOVEREIGNTY TO POPULATION," HE SAID. FRANCO-
PHONE FEARS OF CULTURAL ASSIMILATION WERE CITED BY BELINGER
AS PRIMARY REASON FOR NEED TO ASSUME INDEPENDENCE. AS MANY

OTHER FRANCOPHONE INTELLECTUALS, HE WAS DISTURBED BY "CORRUPTION"
OF FRENCH.

C) BONAVENTURE:

1) THIS CONSTITUENCY IS FIEFDOM OF INTERIM PRESIDENT OF LIBERAL
PARTY, GERARD D. LEVESQUE, WHO WAS RETURNED IN LAST ELECTION BY
HANDSOME MAJORITY. AGAIN, SIZABLE ANGLOPHONE MINORITY AND YOUTHFUL
MIGRATION ARE IMPORTANT FACTORS IN HOLDING THIS CONSTITUENCY
FOR LIBERALS.

2) CONSTITUENCY MANAGER FOR GERARD D. LEVESQUE, ROY
LANGEVIN, TOLD ME HE IS CONFIDENT THAT MAJORITY WOULD VOTE AGAINST
INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM AT PRESENT, BUT IS NOT SO SURE OS SAME
OUTCOME IN SIX MONTHS TIME. HIS PESSIMISM DEEPENED AS HE
CONFIDED FEAR THAT PQ MIGHT EASILY CONVINCE MAJORITY THAT FUTURE
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COULD BE BRIGHT IN INDEPENDENT QUEBEC WITH UNREALIZABLE PROMISES.

3) AFTER SEVERAL COGNACS, THE VERY SERIOUS LANGEVIN SADLY REVEALED THAT GERARD LEVESQUE FEELS HIMSELF "CORNERED." AS LEADER OF QUEBEC LIBERALS HE CAN NOT FULLY SUPPORT "INFLEXIBLE FEDERALISM" OF TRUDEAU, BUT, ON OTHER HAND, HE FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO ATTACK MANY OF PQ PROPOSALS WITHOUT APPEARING TO LARGE SEGMENTS OF POPULATION AS BEING DISLOYAL TO QUEBEC. (COMMENT: IT IS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT LONGEVIN IS FAITHFULLY REFLECTING HIS PATRON'S FRUSTRATION.)

4) LANGEVIN, WHO IS MODERATELY SUCCESSFUL SMALL BUSINESSMAN, ALSO EXPRESSED WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN INCREASINGLY WIDESPREAD SENSE OF DESPERATION AND MILITANCY AMONG FRANCOPHONE SMALL BUSINESSMEN. (SEE ALSO QUEBEC 0088) THEY FEAR THAT UNDEFINED FORCES PQ COULD UNLEASH MIGHT THREATEN FRUITS OF LIFE TIME OF EFFORT AND UNDERMINE THEIR CAREFULLY NURTURED POSITIONS WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES. POTENTIALLY, THIS GROUP COULD BE POWERFUL AND DANGEROUS FORCE SHOULD IT BECOME SUFFICIENTLY AROUSED AND ORGANIZED.

D) HITCH HIKER CENSUS:

1) CONSENSUS OF SOME 30 YOUNG HITCH-HIKERS WITH WHOM I SPOKE DURING COURSE OF TRIP WAS THAT VIRTUALLY ALL YOUNG PEOPLE VOTED FOR PQ IN LAST ELECTION AND WOULD SUPPORT THEM IN FUTURE VOTE. OVER 80 PERCENT SAID THEY WOULD VOTE FOR INDEPENDENCE IN REFERENDUM. ALMOST ALL SAID THEIR AGE PEERS SHARED THEIR VIEWS. MOST ARTICULATE ADMITTED THAT THEIR PARENTS, AND "THE ANGLOPHONES," WOULD OPPOSE SOVEREIGNTY.
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